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Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Yemen

Summary

The present report is the first to deal specifically with the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen. The report, which covers the period from July 2011 to March 2013, contains detailed information on incidents of all six types of grave violations against children, by both the armed forces and armed groups in Yemen. Such incidents include recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other grave acts of sexual violence, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as denial of humanitarian access.

Children in Yemen continue to be victims of grave child rights violations. Overall, violations such as attacks on schools and hospitals and the killing of children have decreased during the course of the reporting period as a result of reduced numbers of incidents of armed violence and civil unrest and the progress made in the implementation of Yemen's Transition Agreement, signed in Riyadh on 23 November 2011. However, there has been an increase in the numbers of child casualties related to mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war. Incidents of association of children with armed forces and armed groups, as well as attacks on schools, also continue to be reported. During the course of the reporting period, the United Nations and its partners progressively expanded their monitoring and reporting network, which has contributed to an increase in verified reports of the recruitment and use of children by the armed forces and various armed groups, as well as of cases of sexual violence and the killing and maiming of children by mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war.

The report highlights the need to implement specific measures to address and prevent grave child rights violations. It outlines the efforts and commitments made by the Government of Yemen and the Al-Houthi armed groups following the visit of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, including commitments obtained from the Government of Yemen to develop a concrete and time-bound action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in the Yemeni Armed Forces, and from Al-Houthi to continue the dialogue with the United Nations on this matter. Specific recommendations are made to strengthen measures to prevent and end grave rights violations against children in Yemen.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), covers the period from July 2011 to March 2013 and documents violations committed against children in Yemen. The report, presented to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, is the first report on grave child rights violations in Yemen to be prepared by the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, which was established in October 2012. The report identifies parties to the conflict responsible for grave violations and abuses committed against children and highlights areas for advocacy and response to enhance the protection of children affected by the conflict in Yemen. The report also contains specific recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict.

2. In 2011, monitoring and reporting activities were hindered not only by the continuing civil unrest and an upsurge in the armed conflict but by the absence of a formally established monitoring and reporting mechanism. Various factors limited the gathering of information and data, including the security situation, reduced international presence, limited humanitarian access and the polarization of civil society organizations, which had a negative effect on the work of United Nations implementing partners. Furthermore, monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations in the area controlled by Al-Houthi in Sa'ada governorate were difficult owing to restricted humanitarian space, as well as a social tolerance whereby the association of children with the Al-Houthi group is considered by communities as an obligation to protect their land, themselves and their families rather than a violation of children's rights. Given these limitations, the incidents and trends described below only partially reflect the actual violations committed against children in Yemen.

3. In 2011, the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/65/820-S/2011/250) listed the pro-Government tribal militias and the Al-Houthi armed group as parties that recruit and use children in armed conflict. In the 2012 annual report (A/66/782-S/2012/261), the Yemeni Armed Forces and the First Armoured Division (FAD) were also listed as parties that recruit and use children. In June 2013, Ansar al-Sharia was added to the list for recruitment and use of children (see A/67/845-S/2013/245).

II. Political and military developments

A. Political developments in Yemen

4. Yemen is among the poorest countries in the world, with the highest birth rate and the second highest child malnutrition rate. Its population includes 1 million children under 5 years of age who are acutely malnourished, 250,000 of whom are considered severely malnourished.

5. In the wake of popular protests in Tunisia and Egypt in January and February 2011, respectively, civil unrest erupted in Yemen, leading to violent clashes between protesters and security forces. These events resulted in a protracted political stalemate over President Ali Abdullah Saleh's future rule. On 18 March, dozens of unarmed protesters in Sana'a and Taiz were killed in clashes with security forces. As

a result, a number of Government officials resigned and joined the opposition, including the Minister of Human Rights and the Attorney General. General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, Commander of FAD, also sided with the opposition and deployed his troops to protect anti-Government protesters. President Saleh reacted by dismissing the Cabinet and declaring a state of emergency. In an attempt to overcome the political deadlock and prevent further deterioration of the situation, I asked my Special Adviser on Yemen to exercise my good offices to engage with all sides in Yemen, working closely with the members of the Security Council, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other international partners. On 22 May, an initiative by GCC for a transfer of power from the President to the Vice-President was signed by the ruling party and the opposition, but not by President Saleh, resulting in a continued stalemate. On 3 June, the mosque inside the Presidential Palace was attacked, seriously injuring President Saleh and other senior officials, which further increased the political crisis and the number of violent incidents.

6. Against this background, the Security Council, on 21 October, unanimously adopted resolution 2014 (2011), in which it demanded that all sides immediately reject the use of violence and called upon all parties to commit themselves to the implementation of a political settlement based upon the GCC initiative.

7. At the request of the Yemeni parties, my Special Adviser on Yemen facilitated direct face-to-face negotiations, building on the efforts of GCC and other international partners. These negotiations resulted in the signing, on 23 November, by President Saleh, the ruling General People's Congress and the opposition Joint Meeting Parties), of a comprehensive Transition Agreement, the GCC Initiative and Implementation Mechanism, for a two-year period. The Agreement provides for the transfer of power from the President to the Vice-President. The first phase of the transition concluded with the election on 21 February 2012 of Vice-President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi as the new President. Subsequently, the Government of National Unity was formed, headed by Prime Minister Mohamed Salem Basendwah. The second phase, currently under way, includes the convening of the National Dialogue Conference, which began its proceedings on 18 March 2013 and is to last six months, a constitution-making process, and general elections.

8. Despite the progress made in the transition process, Yemen continues to face many challenges, with the political process not yet translated into consolidated stability and security gains throughout.

9. Since 2009, approximately 280,000 people have been displaced as a result of the six rounds of conflict, which brought the Al-Houthi armed group to control Sa'ada governorate. Al-Houthi continues to encroach into Government-controlled areas, such as Al-Jawf, Amran and Hajjah governorates, resulting in frequent clashes with Government forces, armed Salafists and armed tribal groups.

10. In the southern governorates, intense armed clashes have continued throughout the reporting period between Government armed forces and Ansar al-Sharia, a group associated with Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. By 12 June 2012, the Government announced that it had regained full control over Zinjibar and Ja'ar districts, which had been strongholds of the armed group since May 2011. However, armed clashes between the Government armed forces and Ansar al-Sharia have continued.

11. On 12 June 2012, the Security Council, in its resolution 2051 (2012), demanded the cessation of all actions aimed at undermining the Government of National Unity and the political transition, including continued attacks on oil, gas and electricity infrastructure, and interference with decisions relating to the restructuring of the armed and security forces. It also expressed its readiness to consider further measures, including under Article 41 of the United Nations Charter, if such actions continued.

12. Following the Security Council mission to Yemen on 27 January 2013, the Security Council, on 15 February 2013, reiterated these concerns (see S/PRST/2013/3), as well as its concerns for children affected by the armed conflict in Yemen.

B. Military developments in Yemen

Yemeni Armed Forces

13. According to Yemeni law, the Yemeni Armed Forces (YAF) consist of the Yemen Land Force, Yemeni Air Force, Yemeni Navy and Coastal Forces and any other forces established by the National Defence Council and approved by Parliament. The armed forces also include the elite Republican Guard, present throughout Yemen but concentrated near the main towns, and the border guards. In March 2011, General Ali Mohsen, Commander of the First Armoured Division (FAD) and the north-eastern region, defected to the opposition. However, following the signing of the Transition Agreement in November 2011, efforts are under way to reintegrate FAD into YAF. In addition, a security force under the Ministry of Interior, known as the Central Security Forces, consists of several brigades, including one which specializes in riot control.

14. Furthermore, pursuant to the Transition Agreement, a Military Affairs Committee was established to end divisions within the armed forces; settle all armed conflicts; end all militarized structures, with all militia and other armed groups moved from the capital and other cities; remove all unlawful checkpoints; and reintegrate the armed forces into a unified, professional command structure. The Committee is also tasked with screening out all those within the armed forces who do not fit the military criteria and assisting with their reintegration into the community.

15. On 6 April 2012, President Hadi issued a series of decrees to promote the modernization of the Yemeni military, which involved new appointments as well as the transfer to new positions of senior civilian and military personnel, including relatives and loyalists of former President Saleh. This triggered tensions that lasted several weeks but which were resolved through the facilitation efforts of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen. On 19 December, the President issued another decree, defining a new structure for armed forces composed of land, air, naval and border forces, abolishing the Republican Guard and FAD and appointing new commanders for a number of army units, including the Central Security Forces. This was followed by a further Presidential decree issued on 21 February 2013, formally declaring the restructuring of the Ministry of Interior, which included renaming the Central Security Forces as the Special Security Forces. Another decree was issued on 10 April, which announced the removal of the Commanders of both the Republican Guard and FAD.

Pro-Government tribal militias

16. The pro-Government armed militias (known as the popular army) are considered to be Government-backed, tribe-based reserve forces which, in times of conflict, mobilize their members to support YAF. The National Defence Council operates recruitment centres and military training camps in support of YAF. The Ministry of Defence provides these tribes with training, weapons and salaries and assigns regular army commanders to lead the popular army units. These tribe-based armed forces were mobilized to fight the Al-Houthi armed group during the six rounds of conflict and supported former President Saleh during the civil unrest. Popular committees, established by tribes and government officials from southern governorates, also supported YAF during the offensives against Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia that resulted in the regaining of control over Abyan.

Al-Houthi armed group

17. The Al-Houthi armed group, referred to by its members as Ansar Allah, is based in Sa'ada governorate and led by Abdul Malik Al-Houthi. This group follows Zaidism, a Shia Muslim school of thought named after Zayd ibn Ali, the grandson of Hussein ibn Ali. The Al-Houthi movement, a religious minority on the border with Saudi Arabia, emerged to seek autonomy from the Yemeni State and to redress socioeconomic grievances and historic marginalization.

18. By means of several armed uprisings against YAF since 2004 and over six rounds of conflict, the Al-Houthi armed group has managed over time to gain control over all of Sa'ada governorate, and even encroached into parts of the neighbouring governorates of Amran, Al-Jawf and Hajjah. In February 2010, the group signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government, which still remains in effect.

Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia

19. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula is an armed group that was formed in January 2009 following a merger of Al-Qaida in Yemen and Al-Qaida in Saudi Arabia. It is a militant insurgent organization considered subordinate to Al-Qaida. In May 2011, following intense armed clashes against YAF, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, together with the locally rooted militant insurgent group, Jama'at Ansar al-Sharia, known as Ansar al-Sharia (supporters of Islamic law), took control of Abyan governorate. As a result, more than 100,000 people were displaced until June 2012, when the Government regained control. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and its affiliates have continued to carry out terrorist-style attacks in Shabwa and Abyan governorates, and is also claiming responsibility for the suicide attack in Sana'a on 21 May 2012, which killed more than 100 military personnel and injured more than 200 who were rehearsing for Yemen's Unity Day parade.

III. Grave violations against children

20. The civil unrest that started in February 2011 has severely affected the Yemeni population, particularly children. Since then, the United Nations and its partners have witnessed the widespread presence of armed elements in the major cities, including the visible affiliation of children with various armed forces and armed

groups. In February 2012, the peaceful transfer of power and the start of the two-year transition contributed to the decrease in the killing and maiming of children caused by live ammunition, both in crossfire and through indiscriminate shelling, in the major cities of Sana'a and Taiz. However, other violations, including the recruitment and use of children for military purposes, appear to be on the increase, mainly in Abyan governorate and Sana'a city. In particular, child casualties due to mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war increased in the conflict areas of Sa'ada and Abyan and peaked in the third quarter of 2012 following the return of internally displaced persons to areas highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war. A sharp reduction was subsequently observed in areas where mine action teams were given access and undertook clearance.

21. Incidents of rape and sexual violence have only begun to be reported recently, most likely owing to the improved humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas and the strengthened capacity of the United Nations and its partners to engage with the communities. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are considered to be generally underreported in Yemen, as rape survivors are often condemned and ostracized if they become known.

Challenges regarding verification of cases

22. The United Nations in Yemen continued to face challenges in monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children, particularly in 2011 during the height of the civil unrest and conflict when a formal monitoring and reporting mechanism had not yet been established, most international humanitarian staff had been evacuated and the social environment was generally politicized. This affected the work of local implementing partners, while the ongoing armed conflict in governorates such as Abyan, Hajjah, Al-Jawf and Sa'ada impeded efforts to monitor grave violations and obtain reliable data and information.

A. Recruitment and use of children

23. During the reporting period, the United Nations documented 84 cases of recruitment and use of children. Of these cases, 69, all involving boys aged between 10 and 17 years, were verified by the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting.

Yemeni Armed Forces

24. Thirty-eight children, aged from 14 to 17 years, were recruited by YAF (16 by the Republican Guard, 14 by FAD, 5 by the military police and 3 by the Central Security Forces). The verified reports were based mainly on the direct testimonies of children who continue to be on active duty, either in Sana'a city or Abyan governorate, including two boys used by YAF as a cook and a servant, respectively, and children manning checkpoints.

25. While the number of reported and verified cases is limited, the recruitment and use of children by YAF is considered to be ongoing, mainly in Sana'a city, but also in Aden, Abyan, and Sa'ada governorates. In 2011, during the height of the civil unrest, armed children in uniforms were seen on a regular basis manning military checkpoints or protecting demonstrators in major cities, such as Sana'a and Taiz. In

2012, while fewer armed children were sighted at checkpoints or performing security duties, reports of incidents of recruitment and use of children increased with the expanded monitoring capacity of the United Nations.

26. Recruitment drives to increase the size of YAF, coupled with inadequate screening procedures and a general lack of socioeconomic options for children, have resulted in many children below the age of 18 years joining the army. Some children were attracted by the prospect of a regular salary; others joined the Republican Guard to support the President, or joined FAD to support the "revolution". Their recruitment was at times facilitated by brokers, such as military officers, family members in the army and local sheikhs (religious leaders) through, inter alia, the use of false birth certificates or identity cards.

27. Among the children interviewed, some feared potential reprisals by YAF if it found they had misrepresented their actual age. At the same time, children were widely expected to take on adult responsibilities at an early age, and boys were expected to carry firearms to protect their tribe or community.

28. Many boys confirmed the presence of other children in YAF, which could indicate that the issue is more widespread. Two children, who were verified not to be on active duty, continued to receive a monthly salary, attend military training and occasionally man checkpoints for YAF on weekends or during holidays.

Al-Houthi armed group

29. The United Nations and its partners continue to face challenges in monitoring and receiving reports of violations by the Al-Houthi armed group in general, and especially in gathering information related to the recruitment and use of children. This is due to a range of factors, including limited humanitarian space and access; the reluctance of family and community members to report such violations; and a culture of tolerance of children's involvement with Al-Houthi among family members and local non-governmental organizations based in areas controlled by the armed group. In addition, the children themselves do not consider their association with Al-Houthi to be a grave violation of their rights but rather an obligation to protect their land, themselves and their families. In 2011, however, the United Nations noted a drive to recruit individuals, including children, to man checkpoints in Sa'ada city or to fight against armed tribal groups in the neighbouring Al-Jawf governorate.

30. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting was able to verify four reports of child recruitment and use by Al-Houthi in Hajjah governorate, a Government-controlled area. All of the children were armed and were manning either checkpoints set up by the armed group or primary health centres used by it.

Pro-Government tribal militias

31. In pro-Government armed militias, reports were verified of three boys (aged 13, 16 and 17 years) who were recruited and used to guard checkpoints by the Popular Resistance Committee in Abyan governorate, which has supported Government military operations in the region.

Ansar al-Sharia

32. Reports were verified by the United Nations in Yemen of 21 children, all boys from Abyan governorate aged between 14 and 17 years, being recruited and used by Ansar al-Sharia. In 2011, reports of recruitment and use were somewhat limited as monitoring was impeded by restricted access to the areas, and because of fear among family and community members of reporting such violations. However, in 2012, owing to the improved monitoring capacity and access to Abyan, the number of verified reports of children being recruited and used by Ansar al-Sharia increased, comprising up to 30 per cent of total verified reports. Of the aforementioned 21 children, 2 boys died during combat, 3 were maimed, 2 returned to their homes and the rest continue to be associated with the group. Many boys joined the armed group based on promises of a better life and monetary rewards, coupled with Islamic ideologies which implied that they would go straight to heaven. Some were drugged, and three were recruited for purposes of sexual exploitation and abuse. Others were sent to Damaj, Sa'ada governorate, to fight against the Al-Houthi armed group; many fought against YAF in Abyan; and many worked as spies, guards and logisticians (buying and selling arms, as well as food and water).

B. Killing and maiming of children

33. During the reporting period, the United Nations in Yemen documented reports of 564 children, 135 of whom were reported killed (111 boys, 24 girls) and 429 were reported maimed (370 boys, 59 girls). Of these, 290 cases were verified, with 79 children (62 boys, 17 girls) killed and 210 (180 boys, 30 girls) maimed. The majority of unverified cases occurred between July and December 2011, when 274 children were reportedly either killed (49 boys, 7 girls) or maimed (190 boys, 28 girls). Verification of these cases was not possible given the aforementioned challenges to monitoring during that period.

34. The identification of the perpetrators responsible for the killing or maiming of children has been a challenge. The perpetrator in 53 per cent of the documented cases involving 157 children (131 boys, 26 girls) killed or maimed is unknown, mainly due to the high number of incidents related to mines, unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. During the reporting period, 89 cases (72 boys, 17 girls) of killing or maiming of children by YAF (consisting of the Republican Guard, FAD, the Central Security Forces and the military police) were verified: 26 children (19 boys, 7 girls) were killed, and 63 children (53 boys, 10 girls) were maimed. In addition, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia were responsible for 13 children killed (10 boys, 3 girls) and 16 children (all boys) maimed; the Al-Hirak armed group was responsible for one boy killed and six children (5 boys, 1 girl) maimed; and the Al-Houthi armed group was responsible for the killing of two boys.

35. A total of 97 (86 boys, 11 girls) child casualties were attributed to various types of explosive weapons. In particular, children have been victims of death or injury due to mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices. Four children died as a result of suicide bombing attacks (three in Abyan and one in Al Bayda' governorate). The perpetrators remain unknown in 39 cases, while in 3 they are reportedly members of Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia. Of the 97 child casualties, 23 boys and one

girl were killed, and 63 boys and 10 girls were maimed. The majority were due to incidents with unexploded ordnance, in which 71 children were either killed (13 boys, 1 girl) or maimed (50 boys, 7 girls). Of these, 65 per cent occurred in Abyan governorate and affected 46 children, with 8 children killed (all boys) and 38 maimed (36 boys, 2 girls). For example, on 1 July 2012, a 12-year-old boy showed to his friends a piece of military ordnance which exploded, injuring him and nine other boys. Another incident occurred in December 2012 when a piece of military ordnance brought home by two children exploded in their home, killing the 12-year-old boy and seriously injuring his 4-year-old brother. Incidents involving children and mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war have increased following the return of internally displaced persons to Abyan after June 2012, when the Government regained control of the area. Fifty-nine child casualties (54 boys, 5 girls) were documented during the period from July 2012 to March 2013, compared to 38 child casualties (32 boys, 6 girls) reported prior to July 2012.

36. A further 70 children (56 boys, 14 girls) were affected by gunshots, mainly during crossfire, which led to the killing of 17 children (13 boys, 4 girls) and the maiming of 53 (43 boys and 10 girls). Over one half of the incidents occurred in Aden (60 per cent), affecting 42 children (33 boys, 9 girls) of whom 8 (6 boys, 2 girls) were killed and 34 (27 boys, 7 girls) were maimed. For example, in June 2012, a 16-year-old boy was killed and three boys aged 13, 15 and 17 years were injured when the Central Security Forces opened fire on a funeral procession in which they were participating; the funeral was of a boy killed earlier by YAF. On 21 February 2013, during protests organized by the Al-Hirak movement in Aden around the first anniversary of the 2012 presidential election, three boys participating in the protests, aged 16 and 17 years, were maimed by the Central Security Forces. In addition, three children (one 12-year-old girl and two boys aged 16 and 14 years) were injured during indiscriminate shooting of demonstrators by the Central Security Forces.

37. A further 25 children were killed (6 boys, 1 girl) or maimed (15 boys, 3 girls) by indiscriminate shelling. For example, on 13 August 2011, three siblings were seriously injured when they took shelter next to their house during heavy shelling by the Republican Guard of their village in the Nihm district of Sana'a governorate, and four boys (aged 11 and 13 years) were maimed in Shabwa governorate when playing football on an empty area close to an alleged Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula hideout which was shelled by YAF.

38. Nineteen children (15 boys, 4 girls) were killed (1 boy) or maimed (14 boys, 4 girls) by shrapnel. For example, on 30 March 2012, five boys (aged 11, 12 and 13) who were playing by the road were injured by shrapnel from a bomb dropped during a YAF airstrike that hit a car belonging to supporters of Ansar al-Sharia in Shabwa governorate.

39. Twenty-four children were killed (6 boys, 6 girls) or maimed (12 boys) by air-dropped bombs. Of these, eight were verified to be victims of drone attacks which targeted Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia hideouts in Abyan, Shabwa and Al Bayda' and were responsible for the killing of six children (5 boys, 1 girl) and the maiming of eight (7 boys, 1 girl). Other incidents include the maiming of a 12-year-old boy who was severely injured by an air-dropped bomb while playing football outdoors in Khanfar district, Abyan governorate, on 29 June 2012.

40. Twelve children (10 boys, 2 girls) were either killed (2 boys) or maimed (8 boys, 2 girls) by bomb explosions. For example, on 29 February 2012, a 17-year-old boy who was shopping at the market was severely injured by a bomb explosion in Crater district in Aden. The perpetrators were unknown in all but one case. The said incident, perpetrated by a member of the Central Security Forces, caused the maiming of six children.

41. Eleven children (10 boys, 1 girl) were killed (1 boy) or maimed (9 boys, 1 girl) by grenade attacks. For example, on 26 September 2012, in Rusud district, Abyan governorate, a 40-year-old former Ansar al-Sharia member and qat seller pulled the pin of a grenade at a market, killing five people, including himself and one 7-year-old boy, and injuring six boys aged 4, 11, 15 and 17 years.

42. The remaining incidents involved seven boys killed or maimed by artillery fire and five children killed or maimed during mortar attacks. Two cases were attributed to YAF, one case to Ansar al-Sharia and one to an unknown perpetrator. One incident occurred on 29 October 2011 in Arhab district, Sana'a governorate, when artillery fired by a tank of the Republican Guard hit a group of children who were playing outdoors, killing three boys (aged 9, 14 and 17 years) and injuring three boys aged 12 years, as well as one 8-year-old. One mortar incident (perpetrator unknown) occurred on 12 April 2012 in Lawdar district, Abyan governorate, hitting an electricity station and injuring one boy who was walking nearby.

43. During the reporting period, 75 per cent of incidents involving 219 children (190 boys, 29 girls) occurred in the southern governorates of Abyan (111 boys, 11 girls), Aden (48 boys, 12 girls), Lahij (13 boys, 4 girls), Shabwa (15 boys, 1 girl) and Al Dahle (3 boys, 1 girl). The next greatest number occurred in the central and western governorates, where incidents involving 53 children were reported in Sana'a city and the governorates of Sana'a, Taiz, Hadramaut and Al Bayda'. Eighteen incidents involving 13 boys and 5 girls were reported from the northern governorates of Hajjah and Sa'ada.

C. Rape and other grave acts of sexual violence

44. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting has documented reports that up to 100 girls in Abyan were forcibly married to leaders or members of Ansar al-Sharia during the past year, when the armed group was controlling Abyan governorate. The United Nations was, however, able to verify only seven cases, involving seven girls between the ages of 13 and 17 years. A dowry as high as US$ 5,000 was paid to some of the girls' families, whose average monthly income is about US$ 12. In other cases, including two of those verified, the girls (aged 15 and 17 years) were offered as gifts by their brothers who had been allowed to join the armed groups. The majority of girls come from the districts of Yafe'a, Lawdar and Khanfar, Abyan governorate.

45. Many girls became pregnant following their marriage to members of the armed group. The girls and their families are reluctant to report abuses owing, among other reasons, to fear of reprisals by remnants of the armed group still present in Abyan. In each of the seven verified cases, the wives reported that they had been abandoned along with their children by the husbands who fled Abyan following the Government offensive.

46. While it is difficult to estimate the extent, reportedly boys are also increasingly being recruited by Ansar al-Sharia for purposes of sexual abuse and exploitation. Three boys were verified as having been recruited by Ansar al-Sharia after having been stigmatized in their communities for being sexually abused by men on regular basis. The boys have been used as spies and logisticians by the armed group, in addition to being repeatedly sexually exploited. Two of them have since left the armed group to return to their families and are receiving appropriate assistance for their recovery. It is highly likely that this phenomenon is underreported owing to the social stigma.

D. Abduction of children

47. Verified reports of cases of abduction of children by armed forces and armed groups are limited. During the reporting period, five reports of abduction were received, of which four (all involving boys) were verified. Of these, one involved an 8-year-old boy who was with his father, a cook in a military camp in Abyan. Both were abducted by Ansar al-Sharia when the armed group attacked the camp, killing some soldiers. The whereabouts of father and son are still unknown. Another boy was abducted by Al-Houthi and later found dead in the 'Ahim area on the way to Haradh, Hajjah governorate. The remaining two boys were siblings abducted by an unknown armed group in the district of Khawlan, Sana'a governorate.

E. Attacks on schools

48. In total, 242 attacks on schools were reported. All except three incidents were verified. These incidents occurred mainly in Sana'a city (94 attacks) and the governorates of Abyan (45 attacks) and Sana'a (88 attacks), but also in Aden, Hajjah, Hadramaut, Lahij, Sa'ada and Taiz governorates. The Ministry of Education, together with the education and child protection clusters of the United Nations country team, conducted rapid assessments of the attacks in Sana'a city and Sana'a and Taiz governorates, covering 348 schools during and after the civil unrest which took place between November 2011 and May 2012.

49. Attacks reported included 110 incidents of physical destruction of schools, including schools that were attacked by shelling, mainly in Sana'a city (52 attacks) during the height of the civil unrest when schools were caught up in the crossfire between YAF and armed opposition groups. Another 37 attacks took place in Sana'a governorate where schools were caught up in fighting between the Republican Guard and armed opposition tribal groups, and in the governorate of Abyan where 19 attacks were reported and verified. For example, in Abyan, during the offensive by YAF which began early in 2012 and continued until June, many schools were closed and occupied by Ansar al-Sharia for military use. This triggered the shelling in Abyan, allegedly by YAF, of at least 19 schools which were either partially or totally destroyed. Another incident occurred in Aden.

50. There were 79 verified reports of intimidation of and threats to students and teachers, caused mainly by sound bombs thrown at schools and gunshots that occurred in close proximity to them. The verified incidents took place mainly in Sana'a city (23 attacks) and the governorate of Sana'a (50), but also in Aden, Hadramaut, Hajjah, Lahij and Taiz governorates. For example, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah School in Sana'a

city is a girls' school that was located close to demonstrations. Many of the girls were too scared to attend school due to the gunfire heard nearby and because of bullets that landed in their schoolyard.

51. Two reports of attacks against teachers and students were verified: one in Taiz and one on 23 February 2013, when the Al-Houthi armed group stormed into Al-Emam Al-Hady School in Sa'ada governorate, demanding to keep one prisoner inside the school temporarily. When the school's management refused to allow the prisoner to enter the school premises, the group opened fire, injuring one teacher.

52. In total, 46 attacks were reported and verified in which schools were occupied and used for military purposes by armed forces and armed groups. The attacks took place mainly in the governorates of Abyan governorate (25 attacks) and Sana'a city (17), but also in Hajjah and Sana'a governorates. For example, Al Andalus School, a girls' school in Sana'a city, was partially occupied both inside and outside by FAD, which hindered the operation of the school as the female students feared the presence of the armed group. In Hajjah governorate, Shaata Al Barad School was closed in August 2012 by the Al-Houthi armed group which used it to store weapons.

53. The majority of incidents were verified through rapid assessments led by the Yemeni authorities. In a large number of incidents, the perpetrators were unknown (137) and the remaining are alleged reports, including 51 incidents attributed to YAF, 36 of them to FAD. The remaining incidents were attributed to Ansar al-Sharia (26), tribal armed groups (19), an armed Al-Islah group (11) and an Al-Houthi armed group (3).

F. Attacks on hospitals

54. Eighteen attacks on hospitals were reported, 17 of which were verified. Nine of these occurred in Hajjah, three in Taiz, two in Aden, one in Abyan, one in Sana'a city and one in Hadramaut.

55. The attacks included four physical attacks on hospitals by shelling and aerial bombardment in Taiz, Abyan and Sana'a city. Al-Jumhuriyya Hospital in Sana'a city was partially destroyed on 19 September 2011; on the same day, two medical personnel were killed in Change Square in Sana'a while they were reportedly assisting injured demonstrators. In Abyan, Al-Razi Hospital was partially destroyed by aerial bombardment by YAF on 5 September 2011, an incident which resulted in the maiming of two children. In Taiz, two physical attacks on hospitals, in October and December 2011, respectively, were verified. One was on Al-Thawrah Hospital, which had been occupied by the Republican Guard since early October. The hospital was being used as a base for military operations while patients were being treated; it was subsequently attacked on 3 December 2011, allegedly by armed opposition groups.

56. In Hajjah, the Al-Houthi armed group was responsible for all of nine attacks, including one incident of intimidation of health personnel and eight of military use and/or occupation by the armed group. These attacks resulted in the closure of eight health centres, including two supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which served as outpatient therapeutic care centres, providing nutritional

interventions for malnourished children. The closure of these centres affected some 5,000 children in the area.

57. Two attacks against medical personnel in Aden and one in Hadramaut were caused by the Central Security Forces which forcibly entered the hospitals in search of patients. In Aden, health personnel were intimidated by random shooting by the Central Security Forces upon entering the hospital; this incident resulted in the death of one boy who was selling fruit in front of the hospital and who was caught in the crossfire.

G. Denial of humanitarian access to children

58. During the reporting period, 46 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified by the United Nations in Yemen, of which 23 related to hijacking of vehicles of the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations. For example, on 16 December 2012, one truck of a non-governmental organization transporting UNICEF water and sanitation supplies was hijacked by armed tribal groups at an illegal checkpoint in Hajjah governorate.

59. Another seven verified incidents of abduction of humanitarian personnel occurred between November 2011 and April 2012 in Sana'a city and Amran, Hodeidah, Lahij, Al-Mahwit, Marib and Sa'ada governorates, involving a total of 19 personnel. One of the incidents involved the abduction of five international staff and two national staff by an armed tribal group; the humanitarian personnel were safely released several days later.

60. Eleven reports of threats or arrests and intimidation against staff members of the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations were documented and verified. One resulted in the evacuation of an international staff member, while another involved the arrest of United Nations staff and their vehicle by Government armed forces.

61. During the reporting period, there were five verified incidents of impeded humanitarian access which prevented safe and unhindered access to the governorates of Abyan and Sa'ada. The governorate of Abyan was inaccessible from the beginning of the reporting period until June 2012, when YAF regained control of the governorate following an intensive offensive against Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar al-Sharia. Furthermore, while internally displaced persons have been returning to Abyan since June 2012, the ongoing presence of mines, unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war, booby traps and improvised explosive devices poses a significant threat, affecting both the population's access to basic social services and the full and safe access by humanitarian agencies for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to high-risk areas, such as in and around Zinjibar district.

62. In the governorate of Sa'ada, Al-Houthi imposed a siege on the village of Damaj, which lasted from mid-October to end-December 2011. The fighting caused disruption in the provision of basic social services, severely affecting the 12,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, challenges were posed by Al-Houthi, which placed conditions on the humanitarian assistance, such as restrictions on recruitment of staff, mandatory hiring of government personnel, and restrictions on the movement of personnel and supplies within Sa'ada. The restrictions resulted in the

diminishment of humanitarian space for many organizations; as a result, some humanitarian agencies have now completely withdrawn from Sa'ada governorate.

IV. Dialogue and action plans

63. Concrete progress was made in 2012 in engaging the listed parties in dialogue, with a view to the preparation and implementation of action plans, in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), on children and armed conflict.

64. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Yemen in November 2012 and met with President Hadi and other members of the Government, as well as key political and military actors, including the leadership of the Al-Houthi armed group, FAD and tribal groups. My Special Representative obtained commitments from the Yemeni Government to develop a concrete and time-bound action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in YAF, and from Al-Houthi to continue the dialogue with the United Nations on this matter. During her visit, a presidential decree banning the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 years was issued; the Government endorsed the Paris Commitments on the association of children with armed forces and armed groups; and the Government agreed to establish an interministerial committee on 1 January 2013 to serve as the main institutional forum for the development of an action plan with the Government of Yemen to address the recruitment and use of children in the Yemeni Armed Forces. On the same day, the Minister of Legal Affairs was appointed to head the interministerial committee, which comprises the Minister of Human Rights, Minister of Defence and Minister of Interior. The committee receives the technical support of UNICEF. A technical working group of the committee was formed in February 2013 and has met several times to prepare a draft of the action plan, which remained pending at the end of May 2013.

65. The fruitful visit of my Special Representative and her engagement with the leader of the Al-Houthi armed group, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, in November 2012, led to an agreement to initiate dialogue with the United Nations in Yemen and the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting with a view to the release and reintegration of children associated with the armed group.

66. Progress was also made in 2012 towards the adoption and implementation of national legislation prohibiting child recruitment and other grave child rights violations. With United Nations support, a national reform committee prepared a legislative policy document on child recruitment, reviewing the existing gaps in legislation, policies and procedures and making recommendations for harmonization with international legal standards. Five relevant military laws were reviewed and amendments were suggested, including the prohibition of voluntary recruitment of children under 18 years of age, stricter penalties for those who recruit children, and a proposal towards systematic and unified recruitment mechanisms. These amendments are to be endorsed by the Cabinet and further ratified by Parliament in 2013.

67. In addition, on 18 April 2012, the Minister of Interior addressed a letter to the police and other relevant State authorities ordering the full implementation of Police Commission Law No. 15 of 2000, which stipulates that the age of new recruits

should be above 18 years, and that those younger than 18 years must be released immediately.

V. Advocacy, protection response and follow-up to recommendations of the Secretary-General and the conclusions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

68. Systematic monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations began in Yemen in 2011 and was formalized in October 2012 with the establishment of the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting. Efforts have been made to promote shared responsibility among United Nations agencies, including through capacity-building of over 80 field monitors and staff, standardization of tools and information-sharing among key stakeholders. This has been channelled through and facilitated by, in part, the child protection sub-cluster and the education cluster. For example, joint assessments of schools were carried out by the child protection sub-cluster, the education cluster and the Ministry of Education in Sana'a city and were further extended to Taiz and Sana'a governorates.

69. The above-mentioned polarization of national and local non-governmental organizations in the wake of political and tribal tensions required additional vigilance in verifying the neutrality and impartiality of reported incidents of grave child rights violations. The limited technical capacity of local non-governmental organizations to undertake this work also required extensive training, coaching and mentoring.

70. In addition to the monitoring of grave child rights violations, a number of advocacy and programmatic protection responses were carried out by the United Nations during the reporting period, as described below.

Advocacy efforts

71. Significant advocacy efforts to end grave child rights violations in Yemen have been carried out by various parts of the United Nations system, as well as by interested Member States. Given the persistent widespread unrest, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in June 2011 conducted a fact-finding mission to Yemen and collected information on grave child rights violations. The Human Rights Council, in September 2011, adopted the recommendations contained in the High Commissioner's mission report (A/HRC/18/21), which called specifically on the Government of Yemen to end the recruitment and use of children. In July 2012, OHCHR conducted a follow-up mission and noted the continued recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, the killing and maiming of children, and the increased number of child victims of mines and unexploded ordnance-related incidents, as well as attacks on schools. The findings of that report were endorsed by the Human Rights Council in September 2012.

72. My Special Adviser on Yemen also visited Yemen on numerous occasions during the reporting period and, in his briefings to the Security Council, highlighted the alarming trends in the recruitment and use of children, as well as the pervasive

risk of mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war for civilians, especially children.

73. As mentioned above, the visit to Yemen of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in November 2012 led to significant new momentum and commitments by the Government of Yemen and the Al-Houthi armed group to address grave child rights violations.

74. These efforts were reinforced by the visit of the Security Council delegation to Yemen on 27 January 2013 and by the statement by the President of the Security Council dated 15 February (S/PRST/2013/3), in which the Council urged the need to respect the rule of law and protect human rights, in accordance with Yemen's international legal obligations, particularly those of women and people belonging to vulnerable groups, such as children. In that regard, the Council welcomed the commitment by the Government to end the recruitment and use of children by the Yemeni security forces through the adoption and implementation of an action plan in line with Council resolution 1612 (2005).

Psychosocial support

75. The child protection sub-cluster, under the leadership of UNICEF and in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and civil society organizations, has provided psychosocial assistance to 498,387 children at schools and in community-based, child-friendly spaces. Of these children, 13,389 were identified as highly vulnerable children, such as survivors of sexual violence, trafficked children, unaccompanied children or children otherwise separated from their families, and received specialized assistance and referrals, including legal aid. In the conflict-affected governorates of Aden, Abyan, Hajjah, Lahij, Sa'ada, Sana'a and Taiz, approximately 6,126 teachers were trained and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide child-centred teaching and psychosocial support to affected children.

Mines and unexploded ordnance

76. Together with the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, UNICEF and other partners have undertaken an accelerated mine risk education programme which has reached 133,594 adults and 126,502 children in the conflict-affected areas of Abyan, Aden, Hajjah, Lahij and Sa'ada governorates since mid-2011. A special fund for victims was allocated to UNICEF and its partners and was used to support 31 vulnerable child victims of mines and unexploded ordnance by covering the high costs of medical care and transportation. To ensure a systematic response to the problem of mines and unexploded ordnance, a strategy for the national mine action programme was developed by the Government of Yemen in January 2013 and adopted in February.

Support to education

77. The education cluster, led by UNICEF and Save the Children, supported the Ministry of Education in conducting a nationwide back-to-school campaign to encourage and facilitate access to schools and to reduce the number of school dropouts in 2011 and 2012, especially among children affected by conflict. Through the campaign, 276 tents for temporary schools were provided in Aden, Hodeidah and Sa'ada, and essential learning materials and school kits were provided to

1,550,000 internally displaced and other vulnerable children. In addition, 60,000 brochures and 30,000 posters were distributed among affected communities to raise awareness about the value of education and the importance of sending children back to school.

78. In 2012, UNICEF rehabilitated 57 schools in Aden and Lahij, which had been occupied by internally displaced persons, and rehabilitated a further 19 schools in Abyan following the return of displaced persons to Abyan governorate. In 2013, plans are under way by the education cluster to rehabilitate 142 schools affected by the conflict in Abyan, Aden, Lahij, Sa'ada and Sana'a, through a grant by a global initiative concerned with education in developing countries, the Global Partnership for Education.

VI. Recommendations

79. I welcome the commitment and efforts made by the Government of Yemen following the visit of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in November 2012 and the visit of the Security Council on 27 January 2013. I strongly encourage the Government to accelerate its efforts to follow up these commitments and finalize an action plan to address the recruitment and use of children by Government forces, in line with Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), and to ratify the proposed amendments to five relevant military laws and allocate adequate resources for their effective implementation. The United Nations stands ready to provide technical support in this regard as required.

80. I welcome the progress made by the Government, in particular the Military Affairs Committee, to accelerate the restructuring of the military and establish appropriate age verification procedures at recruitment centres and the screening of all underage recruits. I call on the Government to ensure screening of the recently dismantled FAD and the Republican Guard, listed in annex I to my annual report (A/67/845-S/2013/245), in order to ensure that no children are integrated into the army.

81. I call upon all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and to respect and uphold the neutrality and safety of schools and hospitals as zones of peace, including the safety of their personnel.

82. I welcome the commitment expressed by the Al-Houthi armed group during the visit of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to engage with the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting and to continue to cooperate with it in developing an action plan to end recruitment and use of children and other grave violations, in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011). I welcome the initial efforts made in this regard, and call upon the Al-Houthi leadership to advance its dialogue with the United Nations.

83. I welcome the Government's efforts in convening the National Dialogue Conference, with the support of my Special Adviser on Yemen, which was launched on 18 March 2013 to foster unity and reconciliation. I encourage all stakeholders to consider children's issues and needs in the context of the Conference. I urge the Government to prioritize the development of sustainable livelihood opportunities for

youth, including through vocational training and employment, in order to positively empower them and prevent their involvement in armed violence. I also invite the donor and humanitarian community to provide additional support to such national programmes and initiatives, together with specialized agencies, to ensure that they are adequately resourced.

84. I am deeply concerned that children are at high risk of being killed and maimed by mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war, as well as by suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices and drone strikes. I condemn in the strongest possible terms the grave violations of children's rights by the use of such weapons, and call upon all stakeholders to prevent such attacks and take steps to reduce their impact on children.

85. I welcome the Government of Yemen's recently signed project for the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, which, in accordance with international standards, will renew and expand its mine action programme with robust strategies to effectively address the mixed contamination of explosive devices in civilian areas and the proliferation of unconventional explosive devices. I urge the Government to prioritize the revision and expansion of survivor assistance programmes, including child-friendly programmes, given the increased incidence of child victims of mines, unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. I further call upon the donor community to ensure that the renewed mine action programme is adequately resourced.